

2015 New Jersey Alternate Proficiency Assessment

Executive Summary

The New Jersey Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) is a portfolio assessment designed to measure progress toward achieving New Jersey's state educational standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to participate in the general assessments: New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK), the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), or New Jersey Biology Competency Test (NJBCT).

The APA was developed for two purposes:

- To measure the progress of a small percentage of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who cannot participate in the regular statewide assessments even with accommodations.
- To ensure that the educational results for all students are included in the statewide accountability system at the individual, school, district, and state levels.

Accountability through assessment provides equity in program and educational opportunities for all students. Alternate assessment ensures an inclusive statewide assessment system and student accountability linked to the common core of learning within the general curriculum in New Jersey.

The APA was designed and developed to meet the requirements of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA '97)*, *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA '04)*, and the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*.

NCLB requires that all students, including those with disabilities, participate in the state assessment program. NCLB also requires that the measurement of progress toward meeting state standards includes assessment results for all students.

The APA fulfills these requirements and is based on the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJ CCCS) in the content areas of Language Arts Literacy, Mathematics, and Science. In this manner, all students in New Jersey are moving toward the same general standards with whatever modifications or supports they need.

The 2014–2015 APA was administered in Science in grades 4 and 8 and in grade 9, 10, 11, or 12 depending on the grade in which a student received Biology instruction. Evidence of student performance as demonstrated in the student portfolio was collected during two collection periods from September 2, 2014, through November 14, 2014, and December 8, 2014, through February 13, 2015. A portfolio is a collection of student work samples that measure a student's progress related to the NJ CCCS, strands, grade-level cumulative progress indicators (CPIs), and skill statements called CPI Links.

Extensive APA information is available at the ServicePoint website provided by Questar Assessment, Inc. (Questar), the current APA vendor, at https://nj-servicepoint.questarai.com/NJxx01_Documentation.aspx.

For the *New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards*, see <http://www.nj.gov/njded/cccs>.

The 2015 APA state summary reports appear at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/>.

Test Design

Peer reviewers from the U.S. Department of Education (USED) assisted the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) in designing the current version of the APA by providing test design and administration recommendations. These recommendations included the following:

- APA students must be assessed on a subset of skills from the general assessment. The skills must be mapped to the general assessment specifications and address the breadth and depth of skills tested across grade levels.
- The skills assessed must link to the CPIs of the student's assigned grade level.
- Students in the same grade must be assessed on the same content; teachers choose from a limited selection of standards and strands to assess their students.
- Strengthen the alignment of the APA program design to grade-level academic content and progress indicators.

In accordance with these recommendations, the APA is developed using test specifications, by grade and content area, that prescribe the standards and strands that must be assessed. Test specifications were written in order to provide more guidance on how to link to grade-level CPIs and to address the federal requirement of linkage to the skills tested in the general assessments. Specifying the requirements increases standardization of the assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Students may not be assessed in functional, behavioral, or access (social, motor, etc.) skills. Functional activities and materials might be used to promote understanding during instruction, but the evidence and activities demonstrating student achievement for assessment must be academically focused and represent the entire grade-level CPI Link.

Test specifications for the 2014–2015 Science APA administration are provided below. The specific standards to be assessed differ by grade.

- **Science:** Four entries
 - Grade 4: One strand each from standards 5.5, 5.6, 5.8, and 5.9
 - Grade 8: One strand each from standards 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, and 5.9
 - High School Biology (grade 9, 10, 11, or 12): Two different strands (A and B) each from standards 5.5 and 5.10

The CPI Links were developed from a subset of the NJ CCCS, strands, and CPIs. The subset was prioritized for assessment on the APA by Inclusive Large Scale Standards for Assessment (ILSSA) content specialists, NJDOE content specialists, New Jersey special

education teachers and general education teachers, and the APA advisory committee. Individuals from each of these areas were also involved in drafting the content in the CPI Links and ensuring its alignment to the NJ CCCS. Each CPI Link offers three levels of connection to each CPI: Matched Link, Near Link, and Far Link. Educators choose one CPI Link per entry and use that as the basis for developing portfolio entries for assessment within the APA.

New test standards should be set whenever a testing procedure is adopted that is judged to be meaningfully different from previous testing procedures. A standard setting for the redesigned APA, administered operationally for the first time in 2008–2009, was conducted from June 9–12, 2009, to describe and delineate the thresholds of performance that are indicative of APA Partially Proficient, Proficient, and Advanced Proficient performance for Language Arts Literacy and Mathematics in grades 3–8 and 11, and for Science in grades 4, 8, and high school (grade 9, 10, 11, or 12). Results from the standard setting studies were used to formulate recommendations to the Commissioner of Education and the New Jersey State Board of Education for the adoption of the cut scores (i.e., proficiency levels). Subsequently, in late June and early July of 2009, the standard setting panelists' recommendations were reviewed by the senior staff in the Office of State Assessments and the Office of Special Education Programs, the Assistant Commissioner for the Division of Student Services, the Deputy Commissioner, and the Commissioner. The review led to some modifications to the panels' recommended cut scores, chiefly affecting the advanced proficient cut points. These cut scores were presented to the State Board of Education on July 15, 2009, and approved unanimously.

Scoring Process

The entries of the APA portfolio are scored based on three dimensions:

- The **Complexity** Dimension is used to evaluate the CPI Link assessed and how closely the complexity and difficulty (Matched, Near, Far) links to the NJ CCCS and grade-level CPI.
- The **Independence** Dimension is used to evaluate the extent to which the student completed the assessment items independently.
- The **Performance** Dimension is used to evaluate the student's accuracy when performing skills represented in the CPI Links.

Complexity is the expectation level at which the student should perform the skill (remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating). Difficulty involves the number of concepts, skills, or ideas on which the student will be working or the type of adaptations and supports in place. Performance measures how well the student has demonstrated the skill specified in the CPI Link within the collection periods.

To score the portfolios, trained expert scorers used a scoring rubric designed to measure student performance on the skill, the level of independence when performing the skill, and the relationship of the skill to the grade level cumulative progress indicator.

A proficiency classification for each content area is derived by combining the scores of the three dimensions. Performance contributes twice as many points as Complexity and Independence to the total score. Each content area assessed receives a proficiency level. The three proficiency levels are:

Advanced Proficient exceeded the level of proficiency

Proficient met the state level of proficiency

Partially Proficient is below the state minimum level of proficiency.

Scores are reported by content area. Entries that do not meet the APA requirements are reported as “0’s” along with an unscorable code. Of the required four entries for a content area, only one scorable entry is required to assign a proficiency level. If the portfolio contains only one scorable entry within a content area, the total score and proficiency level for that content area are reported based on the dimension scores of that entry.

The proficiency level classification allows the APA results to be combined with the general assessment results for accountability purposes as required by USED.

It is important to recognize that the APA system does not report scale scores. The data provided are the key components to interpreting the portfolio results. The APA scores are based solely on the information provided in the individual portfolio submitted. Therefore, it may not be possible to compare these scores to other APA students and students taking the general assessments. Scale scores are not appropriate for use for the APA system so there are no issues of equating involved. There are no sets of test items; therefore, there are no item difficulties, nor is there a need to equate test scores from year to year.

This executive summary includes four tables derived from the statewide summary for the 2015 APA in Science. The state summary data file and the state level Performance by Demographic Group reports are produced and posted on the NJDOE website. The Performance by Demographic Group reports show additional columns including the number of portfolios processed and the percentages of students who scored at the Partially Proficient, Proficient, and Advanced Proficient level. Values are suppressed and an asterisk is printed when the number of students with valid scores for a particular group is greater than zero but 10 or less, or when the percentage for Partially Proficient in a group is greater than 90%.

Table 1 in this executive summary provides the number of participating APA students with valid scores in Science and the percent of students at each APA proficiency level. The percentages may not total to 100.0% due to rounding.

As seen in the Table 1 summary data, 3,957 students were evaluated by the 2015 APA in Science. Of these, 3,656 students had valid Science scores. Science was assessed in grades 4 and 8 and for high school in grade 9, 10, 11, or 12 if the student was enrolled in a Biology course.

Table 2 presents the grade level performance by demographic groups for Science. Results are presented for the total student group and the following demographic variables: limited English proficient (LEP) status, gender, ethnicity, economic status, and migrant status. These tables show the number of students with valid scores and the percentage of students who scored at or above Proficient on their portfolios. This percentage, the students in Proficient or Advanced Proficient, was calculated by subtracting the percentage of students in Partially Proficient from 100.

Students are counted in the state total only once but are counted in as many other categories that apply. Some students might not be included in a gender group because of incomplete or missing information. Students with only one ethnic code are reported in the appropriate ethnic group. Examiners were asked to code all categories applicable to indicate a student's ethnicity. Students with multiple ethnic codes or no ethnic code (unspecified) are counted in the category called "Other." LEP is reported as LEP (Current plus Former) with two subcategories: Current LEP and Former LEP.

The demographic information originates from the data collected on the APA Student Demographic Information Forms (SDIFs) submitted for the students by school districts. Demographic information was reviewed by the school district personnel prior to reporting, allowing them an opportunity to correct any errors.

Highlights from the 2015 APA Performance Results

Tables 2 presents the number of students with valid scores and the percentage of Science APA students who scored at or above Proficient on their portfolios in the tested grade levels. Total results are summarized as follows:

Science:

- Grade 4 – 52.1
- Grade 8 – 52.2
- Grade 9 – 34.7
- Grade 10 – 43.5
- Grade 11 – 50.9
- Grade 12 – 46.5

For high school, Science was assessed in grade 9, 10, 11, or 12 depending on the grade in which a student received Biology instruction. The greatest number of high school students with valid scores was 691 students in grade 11 (as shown in Table 1). Since much smaller numbers of students took Science in grades 9, 10, and 12, the discussion is limited to the grade 11 group. If there were no students associated with a particular subgroup, an n-count of 0 is provided and % At or Above Proficient is left blank.

LEP Status Approximately 1.5% of the APA test-taking population was classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). For the following summary of LEP students' performance, LEP is defined as current and former LEP students combined. In Science, only grade 4 had more than 10 students

taking the APA. Most LEP students were current LEP students rather than former LEP students. Of the 18 grade 4 LEP students, 61.1% were classified as at or above proficient.

Gender

Approximately 2 to 2.5 times as many male students took the Science APA as female students. This ratio had a decreasing trend from grades 4 and 8 to grade 11, decreasing from 70.5% in grade 4 to 65.0% in grade 11.

Across grades 4, 8, and 11, the percentages of female students and male students scoring at or above Proficient were similar. The largest difference was at grade 11 with 53.6% of female students and 49.4% of male students scoring at or above Proficient. In grades 4 and 8, the percentage of students scoring at or above Proficient was greater for male students compared to female students. In grade 11, percentages were higher for female students.

Ethnicity

The highest and lowest n-counts, in consideration of valid portfolios, associated with Science varied as follows:

White	554 students in grade 8 to 319 students in grade 11
Black	322 students in grade 8 to 160 students in grade 11
Asian	109 students in grade 4 to 52 students in grade 11
Hispanic	315 students in grade 4 to 125 students in grade 11

Since 10 or fewer students were associated with the Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and other ethnic groups (some grades had more than 10 students for this category, but the n-counts were small), data for these groups were not reported. (Values are suppressed and an asterisk is printed when the number of students with valid scores for a particular group is greater than zero but 10 or less.) If there were no students associated with a particular sub-group, an n-count of 0 is provided and % At or Above Proficient is left blank.

Within a given grade level for Science, moderate differences in ethnic group performance were observed. The difference between the highest and lowest performing ethnic group, in terms of percentage of students Proficient or above, ranged from 11.4% in grade 4 to 16.1% in grade 11. The average difference across grades 4, 8, and 11 was approximately 13%.

White students did not have the highest or lowest percentage of students classified as Proficient or above for any grade. Black students had the highest percentage of students classified as Proficient or above for grade 11 and the lowest percentage of students classified as

Proficient or above for grade 4. Asian students had the highest percentage of students classified as Proficient or above for grades 4 and 8. Hispanic students had the lowest percentage of students classified as Proficient or above for grades 8 and 11.

For grade 4, the percentage of students scoring at or above the Proficient level ranged from 46.4% of Black students to 57.8% of Asian students. For grade 8, the percentage ranged from 45.9% of Hispanic students to 58.7% of Asian students. For grade 11, the percentage ranged from 40.8% of Hispanic students to 56.9% of Black students.

Economic Status The number of students with valid scores indicates that the average percentage of economically disadvantaged for grades 4, 8, and 11 was approximately 37%.

The percentage of economically disadvantaged students scoring at or above Proficient was greater than the percentage of non-disadvantaged students scoring at or above Proficient for grade 4. The greatest difference was at grade 11 with 44.0% of the economically disadvantaged and 54.4% of the non-economically disadvantaged students scoring at or above Proficient. The smallest difference in performance was observed in grade 8 with 50.8% of economically disadvantaged students and 53.0% of the non-economically disadvantaged students scoring at or above Proficient. The average difference in performance across grades, with respect to the percentage of students classified as Proficient or above, was approximately 6%.

Migrant Status Only non-migrant data appear in this report. Since 10 or fewer migrant students took the Science APA in each grade, data are suppressed for student confidentiality. If there were no students associated with a particular sub-group, an n-count of 0 is provided and % At or Above Proficient is left blank.

Reporting Rules for APA State Summary

In order to safeguard student confidentiality, certain information is suppressed in the state summary files according to the following reporting rules:

- Data are not reported where the number of students with valid scores for a particular group is greater than zero but 10 or less.
- Data are not reported when it is otherwise possible to identify individual student performance.

Table 1
2015 New Jersey Alternate Proficiency Assessment
Number of Valid Scores and Percent of Students at Each APA Proficiency Level

Grade	Number of Portfolios Processed	Science			
		Number of Valid Scores	% Part. Prof.	% Prof.	% Adv. Prof.
4	1,299	1,193	47.9	51.7	0.4
8	1,383	1,273	47.8	41.1	11.1
9*	188	176	65.3	31.8	2.8
10*	282	260	56.5	39.6	3.8
11*	691	668	49.1	48.8	2.1
12*	114	86	53.5	44.2	2.3
All Grades	3,957	3,656	49.7	45.5	4.8

*In 2014–2015, the APA assessed Science in grades 9, 10, 11, or 12 depending on the grade in which a student received Biology instruction.

Table 2
2015 New Jersey Alternate Proficiency Assessment
Statewide Performance by Demographic Groups
Science

	Grade 4		Grade 8		Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
	Number of Students with Valid Scores	% At or Above Proficient	Number of Students with Valid Scores	% At or Above Proficient	Number of Students with Valid Scores	% At or Above Proficient	Number of Students with Valid Scores	% At or Above Proficient	Number of Students with Valid Scores	% At or Above Proficient	Number of Students with Valid Scores	% At or Above Proficient
STATE TOTAL	1,193	52.1	1,273	52.2	176	34.7	260	43.5	668	50.9	86	46.5
LEP STATUS												
LEP (Current & Former)	18	61.1	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Current LEP	14	50.0	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Former LEP	*	*	*	*	0		0		0		0	
Non-LEP	1,179	52.2	1,270	52.2	175	34.3	256	43.0	667	51.0	85	47.1
GENDER												
Female	352	52.0	378	50.5	53	28.3	77	40.3	233	53.6	31	38.7
Male	841	52.2	895	52.8	123	37.4	183	44.8	435	49.4	55	50.9
ETHNICITY												
White	495	54.9	554	55.1	83	42.2	112	34.8	319	53.6	35	54.3
Black	250	46.4	322	50.9	39	17.9	65	52.3	160	56.9	16	43.7
Asian	109	57.8	80	58.7	*	*	20	65.0	52	46.2	*	*
Pacific Islander	*	*	*	*	0		0		*	*	0	
Hispanic	315	51.4	279	45.9	46	37.0	59	42.4	125	40.8	29	37.9
Amer.Indian/AK Native	0		*	*	0		*	*	*	*	0	
Other	20	35.0	33	51.5	0		*	*	*	*	*	*
ECONOMIC STATUS												
Disadvantaged	508	55.3	461	50.8	74	31.1	101	47.5	225	44.0	33	39.4
Non-Disadvantaged	685	49.8	812	53.0	102	37.3	159	40.9	443	54.4	53	50.9
MIGRANT STATUS												
Migrant	0		*	*	*	*	0		0		0	
Non-Migrant	1,193	52.1	1,272	52.2	173	34.1	260	43.5	668	50.9	86	46.5

*Values are suppressed for student counts greater than zero but 10 or less, or when the percentage for Partially Proficient in a group is greater than 90%.